

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9663

DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 1324

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HORG, HO

SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF MILITARY CHANGES IN HONDURAS

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1245, 1261, 1283, 1304

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE INTERNAL CHANGE IN THE ARMED FORCES WAS CARRIED OUT IN COMPLETE SECRECY AND TOOK GENERAL LOPEZ AND THE SENIOR COLONELS BY SURPRISE. THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP POSES A SERIES OF QUESTIONS CONCERNING THEIR FUTURE POLICIES AND HOW THOSE POLICIES WILL AFFECT INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT, THE HONDURAN-EL SALVADORAN DISPUTE AND RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. GENERAL LOPEZ AND THE SENIOR COLONELS UNDOUBTEDLY WISH TO REVERSE THE PRESENT SITUATION, BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO DO SO. LOPEZ WILL ALSO FIND IT DIFFICULT TO REMAIN AS CHIEF OF STATE FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME AS HIS POWER TO ACT IS INCREASINGLY CONSTRAINED BY THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP. A FUNDEAMENTAL PROBLEM CONFRONTING THE MILITARY IS HOW TO ARRANGE FOR AN ORDERLY AND GENERALLY ACCEPTED SUCCESSION

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IF LOPEZ RESIGNS OR IS REMOVED FROM OFFICE. THE MISSION,

ON THE BASIS OF PRESENT INFORMATION, BELIEVES THAT THE RECENT CHANGES HAVE SET IN MOTION A CHAIN OF EVENTS WHICH WILL HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS AND ON U.S. INTERESTS IN HONDURAS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE INTERNAL REORGANIZATION OF THE ARMED FORCES CARRIED OUT BY THE "LT. COLONELS" TOOK PLACE UNEXPECTEDLY AND IN COMPLETE SECRECY. THE TIMING WAS WELL CALCULATED IN THAT THE MEETING OF THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL TOOK PLACE AT THE END OF EASTER AFTER GENERAL LOPEZ HAD BEEN OUT OF THE COUNTRY ON VACATION. LOPEZ AND SENIOR COLONELS WERE CAUGHT OFF GUARD BY THE SUDDEN ACTION AND WERE UNABLE TO OPPOSE THE MOVE OF THE LT. COLONELS' GROUP. THE SECRECY IN WHICH THE ACTION TOOK PLACE WAS CLEARLY DESIGNED TO FORESTALL

THE SITUATION OF LAST NOVEMBER IN WHICH THE SAME ONMICERS ATTEMPTED TO PRESSURE GENERAL LOPEZ INTO MAKING CHANGES THEY DESIRED BUT FOUND THAT THEIR PLANS WERE ALREADY "PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE", WHICH PERMITTED LOPEZ TO BLUNT THEIR AIMS. THIS TIME, THEY DECIDED TO KEEP THEIR PLANS SECRET SO THAT LOPEZ WOULD NOT BE IN A POSITION TO THWART THEM.

2. THE PRESENT SITUATION POSES A SERIES OF QUESTIONS: (A) HOW DOES THIS AFFECT LOPEZ' POSITION? (B) WILL THE "OLD GUARD" BE ABLE TO NULLIFY THE ACTIONS OF THE YOUNGER OFFICERS? (C) WHAT ATTITUDES WILL THE VARIOUS SECTORS OF HONDURAN SOCIETY ADOPT IN RELATION TO THE CHANGE? (D) HOW WILL THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP RESOL# 5#3 7::3 89, 049?)3. 8*)903" 8 43.9;3\$ 94 530 \$92, -,\$ (E) WHAT WILL BE THE MEDIUM AND LONG RANGE RESULTS OF THE CHANGE AND HOW WILL THESE RESULTS AFFECT U.S. INTERESTS?

3. LOPEZ' POSITION IS UNDOUBTEDLY LESS STRONG NOW THAN BEFORE THE RECENT ACTIONS. HE STILL REMAINS CHIEF OF STATE BUT HAS BEEN OUSTED FROM HIS LONG HELD POSITION AS CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES. AS A RESULT THE POSITION OF POWER HE HAS HELD SINCE 1963 HAS BEEN UNDERMINED AND HIS ROLE IN THE HONDURAN POLITICAL-MILITARY STRUCTURE CLEARLY REDUCED. THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT HE ENJOYS THE EXERCISE OF POWER AND WILL ATTEMPT TO REVERSE THE RECENT ACTIONS BY
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UTILIZING ALL OF THE RELATIONSHIPS HE HAS DEVELOPED. HOWEVER, IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT HE WILL BE ABLE TO UNDO THE CHANGES BECAUSE HIS BASE OF SUPPORT AMONG THE SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT WAS VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED BY THEIR FORCED RETIREMENTS AND REASSIGNMENTS. IT IS PROBABLE THAT LOPEZ WILL RELINQUISH HIS POSITION IN THE RELATIVELY NEAR FUTURE, MORE BECAUSE OF HIS OWN PRIDE OF PLACE THAN BECAUSE THE NEW GROUP IN POWER DESIRES HIS RETIREMENT. THEY WOULD

LIKE TO SEE HIM REMAIN FOR THE PRESENT AS CHIEF OF STATE
TO AVOID THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN NAMING A SUCCESSOR.
HOWEVER, LOPEZ WILL BE INCREASINGLY CONSTRAINED AS HIS
POWERS OF DECISION ARE REDUCED AND MAY FEEL THAT IT WOULD
BE BEST TO RELINQUISH HIS POSITION IN THE RELATIVELY NEAR
FUTURE TO ENJOY THE MONEY AND PRESTIGE HE STILL RETAINS.
HIS REPLACEMENT BY THE DECISION OF THE NEW MILITARY GROUP
COULD BE DRASTICALLY HASTENED IF HIS MANUEVERINGS TO REVERSE
THE DECISION TAKEN BY THE GROUP APPEAR TO BE GAINING GROUND.
OR IF HE IS INVOLVED IN A SITUATION THAT GRAVELY DAMAGES
HIS PRESTIGE AND POSITION.

4. THE SENIOR COLONELS WHO HAVE BEEN SHUNTED ASIDE FEEL
AGGRIEVED AND, WITHIN LIMITS, WILL ATTEMPT TO REVERSE THE
SITUATION. FOR EXAMPLE, AIR FORCE COMMANDER COLONEL ENRIQUE
SOTO CANO HAS REPORTEDLY REFUSED THE POSITION OF MINISTER OF
GOVERNMENT AND INSPECTOR GENERAL COLONEL MIGUEL ANGEL GARCIA
HAS ALSO REPORTEDLY REFUSED A DIPLOMATIC ASSIGNMENT.
BASICALLY, THE SENIOR COLONELS HAVE BEEN DEPRIVED OF AN
EFFECTIVE VOICE WITHIN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AND THERE
IS LITTLE THAY CAN DO BUT CRITICIZE AND "DRAG THEIR HEELS"
AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, THEIR CAPACITY TO EFFECT A
REVERSAL OF THE SITUATION APPEARS AT PRESENT TO BE PRACTICALLY
NIL.

5. THE CHANGES IN THE MILITARY AND THUS IN THE GOVERNMENT
HAVE NOT YET RESULTED IN AN EVALUATION BY VARIOUS SECOTRS OF

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HONDURAN SOCIETY OF WHAT THE CHANGES MAY PORTEND. THE SUDDENNESS AND SECRECY IN WHICH THE DECISIONS WERE MADE HAVE INHIBITED THE FORMULATION OF SUCH JUDGEMENTS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE STATEMENTS OF LABOR AND CAMPESINO LEADERS IN REGARD TO THE CHANGE ARE NONCOMMITAL AND INDICATE THAT THEY ARE AWAITING FUTURE ACTIONS TO DETERMINE THEIR OWN POSITIONS. HOWEVER, AS THE POLICIES AND ACTIONS OF THE NEW MILITARY LEADERS BECOME CLEARER IT CAN BE EXPECTED THAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES, PRIVATE SECTOR, CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS, LABOR GROUPS AND STUDENTS WILL DEVELOP THEIR OWN ACTION PLANS BASED UPON THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THEY WILL BE HELPED OR HURT BY THE NEW ORDER. THE INEVITABLE CABINET CHANGES WILL PROBABLY BE THE IMMEDIATE CATALYST FOR THOSE EVALUATIONS. ALL SECTORS ARE ANXIOUS TO SEE HOW THIS CHANGE AFFECTS THEIR PRESENT SITUATION AND POSSIBLE FUTURE POSITIONS IN HONDURAN SOCIETY. THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN PARTICULAR ARE ATTEMPTING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE MILITARY CHANGES TO ADVANCE THEIR CLAIMS FOR A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY AND FREE ELECTIONS.

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6. A DIFFICULTY CONFRONTING THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP IS THE PROBLEM OF SUCCESSION. IF LOPEZ IS REMOVED OR STEPS DOWN IN THE NEAR FUTURE THE NEW CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES COLONEL JUAN JOSE MILGAR MIGHT BE NAMED CHIEF OF STATE AND ANOTHER MILITARY LEADER SELECTED AS CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES. HOWEVER, SUCH A SELECTION COULD CAUSE DISCONTENT WITHIN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE OPERATION OF THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL AS PRESENTLY CONSTITUTED IN THE ROLE OF A COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP BODY IS INHERENTLY CLUMSY AND LIABLE TO INTERNAL BREAKDOWN. IN SUCH A SITUATION THE AIMS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES WOULD BE CONSIDERABLY ENHANCED IF THERE IS DISAGREEMENT AMONG MEMBERS OF THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP ABOUT WHO IS TO LEAD THE COUNTRY. ONE WAY OUT OF SUCH A SITUATION WOULD BE THE FORMATION OF A JUNTA WHICH WOULD PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE RETURN OF A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT THROUGH FREE ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, THIS SOLUTION TO THE SUCCESSION DILEMMA WOULD HAVE TO OVERCOME THE GENERALIZED DISTRUST AND DISLIKE OF THE PRESENT POLITICAL PARTY LEADERSHIP BY THE NEW MILITARY LEADERS. AT THIS STAGE IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT SUCH A SOLUTION WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO THEM UNLESS THE

SUCCESSION CRISIS THREATENED TO ERUPT INTO AN OPEN CONFRONTATION WITHIN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. CLEARLY, THE SUCCESSION IS A COMPLEX PROBLEM THAT WILL HAVE TO BE RESOLVED IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, PARTICULARLY IF LOPEZ LEAVES THE SCENE.

7. THE EFFECT OF THE CHANGE ON THE HONDURAS-EL SALVADOR SITUATION IS STILL UNCLEAR. THE NEW GROUP WILL BE CONCENTRATING ITS EFFORTS ON RESOLVING INTERNAL MILITARY QUESTIONS AS WELL AS DEALING WITH BROADER DOMESTIC GOVERNMENTAL ISSUES. THEREFORE, THE POSSIBILITY OF RESUMING NEGOTIATIONS SOON SEEMS REMOTE. THERE IS A DESIRE AMONG THE NEW MILITARY LEADERS TO REACH A SETTLEMENT WITH EL SALVADOR BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THE PRESENT SITUATION IS A BARRIER TO HONDURAN PROGRESS. HOWEVER, THEY DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE ANY CONCRETE PLANS FOR BRINGING ABOUT A REOPENING OF TALKS. THE TYPE OF INDIVIDUAL THEY SELECT FOR FOREIGN MINISTER WILL BE AN INDICATION OF HOW THEY VIEW THE PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS.

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8. THE NEW MILITARY LEADERS ARE BETTER EQUIPPED FROM A TECHNICAL VIEWPOINT THAN THE SENIOR COLONELS, BUT THEY ARE STILL YOUNG, INEXPERIENCED AND UNACCUSTOMED TO ADMINISTERING AND GOVERNING. THEY HAVE BASED THEIR JUSTIFICATION FOR AN ASSUMPTION OF POWER ON ELIMINATING CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT, IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ARMED FORCES AND IMPROVING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LOT OF THE HONDURAN PEOPLE. WHILE THE AIMS ARE LAUDABLE IN THEMSELVES, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP IS AWARE OF THE COMPLEXITY AND DIFFICULTY INVOLVED IN ATTAINING SUCH GOALS. A FAILURE TO ACHIEVE THEIR AIMS COULD LEAD TO FRUSTRATION WITHIN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AND TO DISILLUSIONMENT AMONG THOSE CIVILIANS WHO SUPPORT THE EXISTENCE OF A MILITARY REGIME. A FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION IS WHERE THE PRESENT CHANGES WILL EVENTUALLY LEAD, GIVEN THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING HONDURAN SOCIETY AND THE INEXPERIENCE OF THE NEW LEADERSHIP.

IN A VERY REAL SENSE, THE CHANGES HAVE SET A CHAIN OF EVENTS IN MOTION WHOSE EVENTUAL OUTCOME IS, AT LEAST AT THIS STAGE, DIFFICULT TO PREDICT. IT SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED THAT THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE CHANGE WAS MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO ALTER THE GENERAL IDEOLOGICAL DIRECTION OF THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT BUT RATHER TO IMPROVE THE ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE ARMED FORCES AND TO QUICKEN AND MAKE MORE EFFICIENT THE GOVERNMENT'S REFORM EFFORTS. HOWEVER, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE NEW LEADERS MAY BE MORE NATIONALISTICALLY MINDED THAN THE "OLD GUARD" BECAUSE OF THEIR IMPATIENCE TO BETTER WHAT THEY SEE AS THE COUNTRY'S

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